

THE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

MORE pleasing works¹, than the present may certainly be found; but my object in writing this, was to provide my children² as well as myself with that kind of amusement, in which they might properly relax and indulge themselves, at the intervals from more important business. I have preserved the same accidental arrangement which I had before used in making the collection. Whatever book came into my hand, whether it was Greek or Latin, or whatever I heard that was either worthy of being recorded or agreeable to my fancy, I wrote down without distinction, and without order. These things I treasured up to aid my memory, as it were by a storehouse of learning: so that when I wanted to refer to any particular circumstance or word which I had at the moment forgotten; and the books from which they were taken happened not to be at hand, I could easily find and apply it. Thus the same irregularity will appear in these Commentaries, as existed in the original annotations, which were

concisely written down without any method of arrangement in the course of what I at different times had heard or read. As these observations at first constituted my business, and my amusement, through many long winter nights, which I spent in Attica, I have given them the name of Attic Nights, by no means imitating the fine titles³ with which various books of a similar kind have been inscribed, by writers in both languages. These authors having got together a various, mixed, and as it were immethodical kind of learning, have for this reason studied to give their books refined and dainty titles. Some of them we find called "The Muses," others "Silvæ:" one man calls his book "Minerva's Robe⁴," another, "The Horn of Amalthea⁵." One is termed "Honey-combs," another "Pastures⁶," another "My own Readings," another "Ancient Readings," another "Flowrets," another "Inventions." This man names his work "Lights," that "Tapestries⁷," others are called "Pandeets⁸," "Helicon," "Problems," "Manuals⁹," "Small Arms;" some also are stiled "Memorials," "Practical Hints," "Leisure Amusements," and "Lessons." We meet also with "Natural History," "Various History," "The Parterre," "The Orchard," and "Common Places;" many have called their books, "Miscellanies;"

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may, some have been stiled "Moral Epistles," others "Epistolary or Mixed Questions," with various other appellations, which to me appear too quaint, and to smell of affected refinement. For my own part, and suitably to my own capacity, without care or study, and as some may think rudely enough, I have called my book *Attic Nights*, from the place where it was written, and from the circumstance of its being in the winter; thus yielding the palm to others in the dignity of my title, as the work itself is obviously inferior with respect to the labour and embellishment of stile. But in making these collections and remarks, I had not even the same purpose in view with the majority of those to whom I allude; for all these, and the Greeks in particular, reading perpetually a vast multitude of things, have heaped together, whatever they met with, without any discrimination¹⁰, as if the quantity were their only object; in perusing which the mind will be fatigued and exhausted, before it meets here and there with any thing amusing to read, ornamental to know, or useful to remember. As to myself, being very partial to the saying of Heraclitus¹¹ the Ephesian, a man of the highest eminence, namely, that various but confused knowledge does not lead to wisdom¹², I have most assiduously employed, and even wearied myself in all those intervals I could steal from business, in turning over and cursorily reading a great num-

ber of books. But I have selected from them not many things; and indeed such only as might lead lively and ingenious minds, by a short and simple process, to the desire of liberal science, and the study of useful arts, or which might rescue men busied with other occupations, from a mean and disgraceful ignorance of things as well as words. The few things, therefore, which may occur in this volume, curious or perplexing, on the subjects of grammar, rhetoric, or even of geometry, or the still fewer and more abstruse on the rights of augurs and the priesthood, let them not be passed over as either unimportant to be known, or hard to be understood. I have not explored, nor discussed elaborately the intricacies of these questions. I have rather given the first fruits¹³, and a taste as it were of those liberal arts, the total ignorance of which indicates a shameful neglect, and would be unpardonable in a man of the most moderate and ordinary education¹⁴.—Of those, therefore, if any such there be, who at their leisure may have some amusement in perusing these lucubrations, I would intreat, that if they shall find what they long since knew, they would not despise it as being trite and very common; for what is there in literature so abstruse, but that many men know it? It is recommendation enough, that these have been neither prated over again and again in schools, nor thumbed in commentaries. Should they meet, perchance, with any

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thing that is new and original, I think it just that they should weigh without any spirit of cavi, whether these very few slight lessons are contemptible as to their power of exciting literary application, or languid in affording ingenuous amusement, or whether they are not rather of that nature and description by which the natural talents may be improved and strengthened, the memory become more prompt¹⁵, the faculty of reason more acute, the speech more correct, in hours of relaxation more delightful, and in exercise more liberal. As for those parts which may seem not sufficiently perspicuous, or too incomplete and scanty, I beg to have them considered as written not so much to instruct as to suggest; and that my readers would be contented with them as pointing out the paths in which they are to go, which afterwards, if they think proper, they may pursue farther by the aid of either books or tutors: as to whatever they may think reprehensible, let their resentment, if they please to indulge any, be directed against those by whom it was originally written. If they shall find the same thing expressed differently elsewhere, let them not be too hastily displeased; I would have them first refer to the contents of those books, and the authorities of those writers, which they from whom I differ, as well as myself, must have examined; but it will be far better for such as have neither enjoyed

pleasure nor bestowed pains in reading, writing, and making remarks, who have not employed their waking hours as I have, who have never polished their minds by examining and extracting the rival efforts of votaries of the same muse, but who are immersed in scenes of riot, or the cares of business, to go their way from these *Nights*; and seek out for themselves other amusements. It is an old proverb, “A jay¹⁶ has no concern with music, nor a hog with perfumes;” but that the ill-humour and invidiousness of certain ill taught people may be still more exasperated, I shall borrow a few verses from a chorus of Aristophanes; and what he, a man of most exquisite humour, proposed as a law to the spectators of his play, I also recommend to the readers of this volume, that the vulgar and unhallowed herd, who are averse to the sports of the muses, may not touch, nor even approach it.—The verses are these:

Silent be they¹⁷, and far from hence remove,
 By scenes like ours not likely to improve,
 Who never paid the honour'd muse her rights,
 Who senseless live in wild impure delights;
 I bid them once, I bid them twice begone,
 I bid them thrice, in still a louder tone:
 Far hence depart, whilst ye with dance and
 song
 Our solemn feast, our tuneful nights prolong,

At present there are twenty books of these remarks. Whatever portion of future life the gods may give me to enjoy, that I can spare from the care of my domestic concerns, and the education of my children, it shall be wholly employed in making a similar collection, at hours stolen from weightier business, and dedicated to subjects of secondary concern. The number of my books, therefore, with the favour of heaven, shall correspond with the extent of my life, whatever this may be; nor do I desire to live any longer than I may be able to retain this faculty of writing and making observation.—To each chapter I have prefixed an account of its particular contents, that it may immediately appear what may be sought, and found in every book.

NOTES ON THE PREFACE,

THE whole of this Preface in the earlier editions which appeared of our author, was subjoined to the last chapter of the last book. It seems wonderful how it should get there, having no manner of connection with the subject of that chapter. Later editions restored it to the place for which it was obviously intended, for no preface can be adduced, which more sensibly or in more elegant terms informs the reader of what the author had in view.

¹ *More pleasing works, &c.*]—I have in a former work remarked, that it was an elegant distinction of the earlier writers to enter at once with a manly abruptness on their subject, without misemploying their reader's time or their own, by elaborate and useless apologies, yet in their dialogues such apologies were often interwoven.

² *My children.*]—Thus Cicero avowedly wrote his Book of Offices for the use of his son.

³ *Fine titles.*]—In the infancy of letters in this country, a propensity prevailed for giving the most whimsical and unaccountable titles to books: we accordingly meet with "Hunger's Prevention," "Omnibus et Singulis, or Matter for all Men," "The Will of Wit, Wit's Will, or Will's Wit, chuse you whether," "The Dialogues of the Creatures," "A Springe to catch Woodcocks," "Your servant Gentlemen," with innumerable others. On this subject also
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of the titles of books, the reader may consult the Prolegomena of Salmasius in Solinum. That learned man ridicules Gellius for having fallen into the same error for which he censures others. The appellation of Noctes Atticæ being, in the estimation of Salmasius, no less fastidious and affected than those which are enumerated in the Preface.

* *Minerva's robe.*]—The original is *πεπλον*, which in its appropriate sense means an embroidered vest sacred to Minerva; this was its primitive sense, but afterwards it was used to signify, generally, a matron's robe. In its first meaning it was specifically applied to a vest which was carried about at Athens with great solemnity at the feast of the Panathenæa; it had embroidered on it the figure of the giant Enceladus, who was slain by Minerva, and was worked, not by any female hands indiscriminately, but by virgins, who were called *Εργαστιναι*; there were also woven in this robe the names of exalted and illustrious characters, such being termed *αξιοι πεπλου*. See the Equites of Aristophanes, line 560:

Εὐλογησαι βελομεσθα τῆς πατρὸς ἡμῶν, οἱ
ἄνδρες ἦσαν τῆς δὲ τῆς γῆς ἀξιοὶ καὶ τὸ πεπλόν.

In the former of which lines, a remarkable resemblance appears to the first verse of the 44th chapter of Ecclesiasticus:

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begot us.

If the *peplus* received any contamination from dirt, or any thing else, it was the office of particular persons to cleanse it. There was also a *peplus* at Elea, sacred to Juno. In the *Iliad*, when the Trojan matrons go in solemn procession to the temple of Minerva, to implore that goddess to remove Diomed from the field of battle, the offering imagined to be most acceptable to her is a superb vest:

Go, a spotless train,
And burn rich odours in Minerva's fane;

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The largest mantle your full wardrobes hold,
 Most prized for art, and labour'd o'er with gold,
 Before the goddesses honoured knees be spread, &c.

Where the word used is *πεπλος*, upon which lines of Pope I would remark, that the strong epithet of *αγλαΐης*, applied to Minerva, is unnoticed; that "a spotless train" is expletive, and not in the original; and that Homer's description of the *peplus* to be used for this purpose is, literally, the most elegant, the largest, and that which you yourself value the most. The carrying of this robe in solemn procession is also mentioned by Virgil:

Interea ad templum non æquæ Palladis ibant
 Crinibus Iliades passis, peplumque ferebant,
 Suppliciter tristes.

Cicero, in his Epistles to Atticus, b. 16. c. 11. mentions a book written by Varro, and called *Pepliographia*, the subject of which is the praise of illustrious characters. Aristotle also wrote a book, to which he gave the name of *Peplum*, and which contained the epitaphs of heroes: a fragment of this book is preserved by Canter. In this also, as Canter affirms, were the genealogies of Homer's heroes. Consult the Ciceronian Index of Ernestus.

* *The horn of Amalthea.*]—The story of this horn is variously related. Jupiter was said to have been brought up by some nymphs, and fed with goat's milk, and that in gratitude he translated the goat amongst the constellations, and gave one of the horns to his nurse, which was endued with the singular virtue of producing to the nymph whatever she desired to extract from it. According to Erasmus, it was a title commonly given to books, the contents of which were of a miscellaneous nature. From this the word *cornucopia* is derived, which in every modern nation and language has been applied as emblematic of abundance.

* *Paſſures.*]—Such collections were called Anthologies, and

and sometimes *στέφανον*. See *Carmen Meleagri*, p. 55. of the *Notitia Poetar. Antholog.* subjoined to the Oxford edition of *Cephalus. Anth. Gr.*

⁷ *Tapestries.*]—The Greek word is *Στρωματεῖς*; this also means books of miscellanies.—Thus *Clemens Alexandrinus* confesses that he gave the name of *Στρωματεῖς* to his books from their various matter. Our author seems particularly to allude to the *Στρωματεῖς* of *Plutarch*, cited by *Eusebius* in his *Preparatio Evangelica*, book i.—*Thyffius*.

Origen also wrote a book, which from its miscellaneous matter he called *Στρωματεῖς*; a metaphor, says *Erasmus*, taken from painted hangings and tapestry, of which formerly the rich and great were extravagantly fond. The parasite, in the *Pseudolus* of *Plautus*, threatens his slaves, that he will so lace their jackets that *Campanian* tapestry shall not be half so variegated. See *Erasmus*, where he explains the term *Peristromata Campanica*.

⁸ *Pandects.*]—This literally means a compilation, being derived from *παν* all, and *δεχομαι* to receive. It has since also been not unfrequently used as a title to books, but is more particularly applied to the *Digest* or *Code* of *Justinian*.

⁹ *Manuals.*]—In its first sense *Εγχειρίδια* means daggers, weapons convenient for the hand. This is the title of a book which we have of *Epictetus*. *Erasmus* also wrote a book which was termed *Enchiridium Militis Christiani*. *Manual*, till within these few years, was an appellation frequently given to books in this country, but principally confined to those on the subjects of devotion. It is now considered as quaint, and is becoming obsolete.

¹⁰ *Without any discrimination.*]—The original contains a proverbial expression, which it would be difficult to convey in a translation. “*In quas res cunque inciderant, alba ut dicitur linea, sine cura discriminis solum copiam sectati converrebant.*” “Whatever they met with a white line, as it is said, and without taking the pains to discriminate, they
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heaped together, as if aiming at quantity only." The line anciently used by architects was a white line, which, previous to its being applied, was rubbed over with red chalk: thus, say the commentators, the expression of *alba linea* was applied to a person who approved of every thing indiscriminately. The correspondent term in Greek, of *λευκή σταθμή*, was used with the same signification by Plato and by Plutarch. It also occurs in a fragment of Sophocles, preserved in Suidas:

Τοις μὲν λόγοις τοῖς σοῖσιν ὃ τεκμαιρομαι
Οὐ μάλλον ἢ λευκῷ λίθῳ λευκή σταθμή.

I can no more guess what you mean than if a white line were applied to a white stone.

Erasmus in his *Adagia* does not omit to make mention of this proverb; and the reader will find the Greek expression of *λευκή σταθμή* explained in Zenobius.

¹¹ *Heracitus.*]—The history of this philosopher is given by Diogenes Laertius, and may also be found in Moreri. The more obvious circumstances of his life and manners, as contrasted with those of Democritus the Cynic, are sufficiently known.

¹² *Lead to knowledge.*]—The sense of the Greek proverb, says Gronovius, is, that confused and ill digested knowledge oppresses the mind, and does not promote wisdom. A similar sentiment occurs in Seneca; non refert quam multi sed quam boni legantur libri. And the Cynic, in the 13th book of Athenæus, expresses himself to the same effect:

Πελυμαθὴ μὲν οὖν τῆς, ὃ κενωτερον αλλο.

Nothing can be emptier than excess of knowledge. *Gronov.*

Gronovius has omitted to inform the reader that the above Greek verse, quoted by the Cynic in Athenæus, is given to Hipponax. See also the first chapter of Ecclesiastes, the last verse. "For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

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¹³ *First fruits, a taste.*]—Terms taken from the ceremonies of sacrifice. Libamentum alludes to the custom of sprinkling wine on the ground after the offering up of the victim, which was called the libation; but the priest first of all tasted it.

¹⁴ *Moderately.*]—This is certainly not expressed with the full force of the original, which is *civiliter*, and which implies such an education, as every Roman citizen may be expected to receive.

¹⁵ *The memory.*]—See this passage in a manner transcribed by Macrobius, in the first chapter of the first book of the Saturnalia. Invenies plurima quæ sit aut voluptati legere, aut cultui legisse, aut usui meminisse, nihil enim huic operi insertum puto, aut cognitu inutile, aut difficile perceptu, sed omnia quibus sit ingenium tuum vegetius, memoria adminiculatio, oratio sollertior, sermo incorruptior.

Concerning which passage it may be observed, that the first editions of Aulus Gellius retained the reading of *oratio sollertior*, which, considering the context, has no meaning at all.

¹⁶ *A jay.*]—A dunce has no concern with the muses, no more have jays, the most garrulous of birds, with musical instruments. Concerning the Amaracus, the following words of Servius seem pertinent in this place. Amaracus was the name of a youth who was perfume bearer to some prince; he happened to fall while carrying some unguents, and the mixture of them made the odour still more exquisite; from hence the most delicious perfumes were called amaracina. He was changed into the herb sweet marjoram, which, henceforth bore this name. Virgil mentions the herb, *Æn. i. 693.*—

Ubi mollis amaracus illum

Floribus et dulci adspirans complectitur umbra.

See also Pliny. Nat. Hist. xxi. 11.

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The aversion of hogs to the amaracus is thus mentioned by Lucretius:

Denique amaracinum fugitat sus, et timet omne
Unguentum, nam setigeris subus acre venenum est. *Thyſus.*

This proverb is mentioned by Erasmus, and well explained. The jay, says he, is the noisiest of birds, and associates only with its kind, thus a more intolerable noise is excited, whereas music requires still and silent attention. With respect to the latter part of the expression, the scriptural phrase of casting pearls before swine is of similar import, and conveyed in terms by no means less energetic. The Greeks had a proverb not very unlike this in its application: Ὑ δια ρόδων (sus per rosas) a hog amongst roses, applied to stupid people, upon whom good instruction was thrown away.

¹⁷ *Silent be they, &c.*]—These verses occur in the *Ranæ* of Aristophanes, act i. scene 7.—After the three first many others are inserted in the original, describing particularly a number of mean, ignorant, or profligate characters, whom in like manner the poet wishes to absent themselves from the representation of his play; the passage then concludes as it is here quoted by Gellius.